



Fall In-Person Learning: DESE's and DPH's Regulations for a Safe Return

School Committee Presentation - August 11, 2021





Agenda

1. Guiding Principles
2. Commissioner Guidance
3. Face Mask Requirements
4. Testing and Quarantining
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Guiding Principles

1. Our decisions will be guided by the latest health data and input from public health experts. We will continue to monitor the guidance from the DESE and the DPH throughout the summer.
2. We will continue to provide supports for families and staff.
3. We make a commitment to equity, with the belief that a high quality public education is a fundamental civil right.





DESE Commissioner's Guidance (*as of 7/30/21*)

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner, Jeffrey Riley, released new guidance on July 30, 2021 containing requirements for in-person learning in the Fall. The following passages are contained within the guidance documents:

Massachusetts has among the highest vaccination rates of any state in the nation ¹, and evidence continues to reinforce that the COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective, especially against severe disease ².

At the same time, even for those students not yet vaccinated, the apparent risk of COVID-19 to children remains small.

Vaccination is a critical strategy in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on in-person learning.

¹ "Data Table for COVID-19 Vaccinations in the United States," CDC 2021. Data as of July 26, 2021. Available at: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations>

² Jamie Lopez Bernal, Nick Andrews, Charlotte Govver, Eileen Gallagher, et. al. July 21, 2021. "Effectiveness of COVID-19 Vaccines against the B.1.617.2 (Delta) Variant." The New England Journal of Medicine. Available at: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2108891>



DESE & DPH Mask Guidelines



- This fall, DESE and DPH **strongly recommend** that all students in kindergarten through grade 6 wear masks when indoors, except students who cannot do so due to medical conditions or behavioral needs. Masks are not necessary outdoors and may be removed while eating indoors.
- DESE and DPH also **strongly recommend** that unvaccinated staff in all grades, unvaccinated students in grades 7 and above, and unvaccinated visitors wear masks indoors.
- DESE and DPH **recommend** that schools allow vaccinated students to remain unmasked.
- Any individual at higher risk for severe disease from COVID or with a household member who is at high risk is encouraged to mask regardless of vaccination status.
- Any child or family who prefers to mask at school would be supported in this choice.
- By federal public health order, all students and staff are required to wear masks on school buses at this time.
- All staff and students must wear masks while in school health offices. Additional guidance for school health professionals is forthcoming from DPH.



DESE & DPH COVID 19 Testing Protocols



Lowell Public Schools will continue to maintain a robust plan for COVID-19 testing in schools to include the screening (pooled) testing for students and staff. DESE and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services will continue to offer these services at no cost to our district.

Diagnostic testing, such as the BinaxNOW rapid antigen test, is an important tool for use in testing asymptomatic close contacts as part of updated quarantine guidance provided by DESE and DPH. The district will be able to sign up for the statewide COVID-19 testing program as soon as it becomes available later in August to minimize the number of students required to quarantine outside of school.



DESE & DPH Quarantining Guidance



- Districts in the statewide testing program will be able to implement a new “test and stay” protocol in lieu of requiring asymptomatic close contacts to quarantine.
- Under test and stay, asymptomatic close contacts will have the option to remain in school and be tested daily with BinaxNOW for at least 5 days.
- Vaccinated staff and students are exempt from quarantine.



Options for Medically Approved Extended Absences

Home teaching or tutoring may be provided for those students who cannot attend regular classes because of certified medical or special needs reasons each of which must be documented by a medical statement or an official Individual Education Plan (IEP) as described in the LPS policy manual.

Home teaching assignments may be coordinated by an appropriate building leader. A tutor (certified instructor approved by the Lowell School Department) will be assigned to support homebound instruction. Expectations regarding grading and credits will be worked out before and as part of the arrangements, procedure, and implementation of the home teaching or tutoring effort. The tutor will coordinate the work and evaluation with the respective teacher and the Department Head of each subject covered.

IHBF - HOMEBOUND INSTRUCTION

This is not remote learning. *On March 5, 2021, the MA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted amendments to the Student Learning Time regulations on an emergency basis. These amendments provide the Commissioner of Education with the authority to determine when hybrid and remote models will and will not count toward meeting the required student learning time hours. 603 CMR 27.08(2)(d). For the 2021-2022 academic year, remote learning has not been approved for student learning time under any circumstances related to COVID-19*





Options for Leaves of Absences

FMLA - Employees may apply for paid leave under the provisions of the Family Medical Leave Act. Applications will require medical documentation. Such applications should be filed with Mrs. Debra Jarvis of the HR office.

Unpaid Leaves of Absence- Employees may apply for an unpaid leave of absence for the 2021-2022 school year by filing a request with the HR office. If you intend to request such a year long, unpaid leave, please do so immediately.

Provisions for leaves are also detailed in Collective Bargaining Agreements.





Next Steps

Regulations related to COVID-19 continue to evolve. LPS must remain nimble to adapt as new variants of the virus emerge, as new research findings are released and the efficacy of available vaccines is assessed.

For the 2021-2022 academic year, LPS will follow all guidance regarding COVID-19 safety protocols provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) which continues to work in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH).

The superintendent shall adjust safety protocols for all LPS schools if required at any time by DESE or as required at any time in consultation with the City of Lowell to adhere to safety requirements which may be later established for Lowell's public buildings.

